



*The Style Guide is in the process of being updated to include the information about the new branding and associated changes. Please refer to [http://sfanet/sfa\\_communications/sfa/intro.html](http://sfanet/sfa_communications/sfa/intro.html) (SFA Graphics and Photos) for the most current information. Some sections within this Guide are still relevant and will not change.*

# SFA Style Guide



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## 1. Definition of Web Style

Web Style refers to the way Web content looks and feels. To ease navigation and promote consistent Intranet and portal applications, all Web content should have a common look and feel. In other words, all content within a Web site should share the same writing style, graphics, colors, and user interface elements.

This document includes:

### Web Style Requirements and Recommendations

Web Page Templates to use when laying out your pages, and Common Images to use within your Web site. All Intranet contents must adhere to SFA Intranet Web Style.

## 2. User Interface Considerations

The user interface you create should accomplish the following:

- It must have enough personality to attract a user to try the system for the first time.
- It must provide easy access to information so first-time users don't become intimidated.
- It should make the underlying technology disappear.
- Your interface and your information should reinforce the individual's understanding of the SFA community and their role as a member of it.
- The information you provide should be constantly refreshed and vibrant enough so users realize its long-term value and don't tire of seeing it – in fact, it should create increased use with time.
- It should keep the users and their goals in mind.

Good sites generally embody the well-established design and user interface principles identified in Elements of Good User Interfaces. (See Exhibit 1 on next page)



**Exhibit 1**

*Elements of Good User Interfaces*

<i>Provides Immediate User Feedback</i>	User feedback is primarily visual. For example, using a client side script, e.g., JScript®, to change the color of buttons as the mouse passes over them gives the user immediate feedback (audio can also be used to provide feedback, but should be used selectively). Immediate feedback creates the perception of high performance.
<i>Builds on Concepts the Users Know Already</i>	Each Channel web sites should adopt as many elements of the SFA Intranet as possible in order to leverage the user's knowledge across the entire Intranet. Reusing layout, headers, and navigational images is particularly important.
<i>Provides Consistency</i>	Within a Web site, fonts, colors, and images should be used consistently.
<i>Draws Eye Toward Important Areas</i>	Avoid using bright colors or animation in a way that competes with content. Use color, fonts, images, and layout to focus attention on the key elements the page.
<i>Doesn't Redefine the Behavior of Elements The User Knows From Other Contexts</i>	For example, don't underline text for emphasis because users expect underlines in Web pages to indicate links.
<i>Breaks User Interactions into Small Chunks</i>	Minimize the number of clicks necessary to access data or perform a function. For example, avoid organization structures within Web sites that are more than three levels deep.



### 3. Web Style Requirements and Recommendations

This section presents items as either requirements or recommendations. Requirements mean that the item is an SFA standard. All requirements must be followed to be published on the SFA Intranet. A “check” indicates a requirement, and the item usually contains the word “must.”

For example:

- ✓ The developer must use the Web page templates to lay out your content.  
Recommendations should be followed unless there’s a sound business reason not to do so. Recommendations are indicated with triangles, and they usually use the word “should.”

For example:

- △ The developer should provide alternatives to audio or video, such as a textual transcript. Contact the Webmaster (e-mail: [webmaster@SFA.gov](mailto:webmaster@SFA.gov)) with questions about Web style. (See SFA Accessibility Guidelines – Guideline 1.)

### 4. Overall Design

- ✓ You must use the layouts detailed in the “ Web Page Templates” section to lay out your content. These templates contain information about standard areas, headers, and footers that must appear on every Web page.
- ✓ Your content must be designed to comply with SFA coding standards and Intranet Architecture, which includes the browser, search engine and controls.
- ✓ All content must be named according to established File Naming Conventions and File Extensions and Types.
- ✓ All pages must contain the <META> tags. A shell of these <META> tags will be included in the Web page template.
- ✓ Each page must contain a descriptive title (in the <TITLE> tag). This is the title that will appear when people search for information, when they create a “Favorites” listing in their browser, when they print the page, and in the title bar of the browser window.



- ⚠ The content area of all pages should have a white background. (Navigational frameworks may be other colors)
- ⚠ Fonts used should come from the collections installed with Windows®, and the TrueType fonts Microsoft® has made publicly available online at <http://www.microsoft.com/opentype/>. The SFA Intranet stylesheet includes alternate fonts for the MAC and UNIX platforms.
- ⚠ Each channel should maintain a Site Map that shows the structure of their site. The Site Map should list the main content areas of the site and should hyperlink from the Site Map to these areas. This will ensure quick and easy navigation from the Site Map to the main areas of the site. Modifications to the Site Map should be coordinated through the primary channel developer.
- ⚠ Be aware that people will access your content over a 28.8 kbs modem, or less. You should test your content over remote access lines to ensure it is accessible by those using dial-up services.

## 5. Links

- ✓ All URLs must be coded as an absolute reference, rather than a relative reference. For example, this absolute path contains the entire directory in the link `<A HREF="/project_1/images/map.jpg"> SFA Map</A>`. In contrast, this link uses a relative path: `<A HREF="images/map.jpg">SFA Map</A>`. Start all absolute links with a slash (e.g. `"/"`).
- ✓ Do not use server machine names nor protocols ("`http`") in hyperlinks.
- ✓ Place a "Link Type" inline image next to hyperlinks that will change the user's environment. These images provide users with a visual cue as to where the link will take them. For example, "Outbound Arrow" indicates that the link will take them to someplace on the Internet, and "Email" indicates that this link will allow the user to send an e-mail.
- ✓ Links to files larger than 30 kilobytes must be labeled with the file size to inform users of a potential delay in downloading, e.g. SFA Org Chart (35K).



- ⚠ When linking from images and image maps, provide alternative navigation techniques such using <ALT> tags for images and mirroring image maps with text links.
- ⚠ When linking to existing content on the Intranet, contact the owner of the page to which you will be linking as a courtesy. Be aware that people may change their content, so you should check those links periodically.
- ⚠ When linking to a document that was converted using HTML Transit, be aware that those page names are automatically generated, which means that your link may point to the wrong place if the document is edited and reconverted.
- ⚠ When linking to the Internet, be aware that not all of SFA can access the Internet. If you have questions or concerns about external links, please contact SFA Webmaster.

## 6. Writing Style

- ✓ Refer to the Associated Press (AP) Style Guide (N. Goldstein; The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law) for spelling and grammar. Spell check and proofread all text, even text on images.
- ✓ No text is to be underlined unless it is a link. This includes text that appears on graphics as well as typed text and headings. Be particularly aware of this when converting existing word processing documents to HTML.
- ✓ Columns of numbers must be right justified. Generally this is easiest to do within TABLES. Numbers within a column must have the same number of decimal digits so they align on their decimal points. (Numbers within text boxes may not align right justified)
- ⚠ Use as few headings or typographic styles to ensure a clean, consistent flow to the content. Use horizontal rules <HR> to break up sections of content within a page to maintain readability of the document.



## 7. Page Length

- ✓ Pages longer than two screens in length must contain navigational links within the page to eliminate the need for scrolling to navigate. This should be done using <A NAME> anchor links or through a table of contents.
- ⚠ Pages should not be longer than two screens in length, based on the standard screen resolution (800x600) for the Dept of Education web design. Pages longer than 4 screens should be broken up into smaller pages and hyperlinked from a Table of Contents.

## 8. Images

- ✓ Images should be saved in either the Graphic Interlaced Format (GIF), including GIF, GIF89, and animated GIFs, or Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) format.
- ✓ Name images according to the SFA “File Extensions and Types” and “File Naming Conventions” standards
- ✓ All graphics and color elements should use the Web Safe 216 color cross-platform palette. Use the palette to create all blocks of colors, text, lines, etc., and to reduce the color depth of images. Using the standard palette prevents images from dithering, or looking dotted and fuzzy, in the browser. When saving GIFs reduce the amount of colors and/or bits to limit file sizes. JPEGs should be saved using low to medium quality and a progressive format.
- ⚠ GIFs should be used for images that are predominantly made up of solid colors, blocks of colors, lines and text. The Graphics Interlaced Format reads images line by line from left to right. Therefore, the more color variations per line, the greater the size of the “giffed” file. GIFs use no more than 256 colors; try to use even fewer.
- ⚠ If an image has many color variations, and if attempts to “GIF” this file results in substantial quality loss, use the JPEG format. JPEG is especially efficient for images made up of many colors, complex gradients, and photographs. Most photographs (except small duotones or greyscales) should be compressed using the JPEG format. If you are constrained for space, JPEG your image at the Low setting. If you can afford better quality, JPEG at Medium.





- ✓ All images must contain <ALT> text in case the image does not load in the browser.
- ✓ All common graphics should be put in a “/images/” folder and should be made available for all SFA employees to use. You must use these images as provided, without altering the dimensions of the logo by using WIDTH and HEIGHT tags and without modifying the image.
- ✓ Save any common images that you create into a common images directory so that other people may use those images.
- ✓ The style of navigational buttons should be consistent. The fonts used for text on button boxes should be consistent and easy to read.
- ⚠ Image maps should have clearly defined “clickable” areas so users are not confused about what will happen when they click on an image map.
- ⚠ Images should contain the WIDTH and HEIGHT attributes to help images load faster.
- ⚠ All mapping should use client-side image maps rather than server-side image maps

## 9. Audio and Video

- ⚠ Use cross-platform file formats, such as WAV, MP3, and AU for audio, and MOV or AVI for video.
- ⚠ You must provide alternatives to audio or video, such as a text-based transcript to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## 10. Information Priority and Security

- ✓ All documents on the SFA Intranet must be evaluated and authorized for importance and priority. Communicate the priority of your content to your Content Owner.
- ✓ All documents on the Intranet must be evaluated as Public, Internal, Confidential, or Privileged. Confidential and Privileged information must be clearly labeled using “Confidential” and “Privileged”. You may choose whether or not to label Public and Internal information.



- ✓ Security access to a Web page should adhere to the most restrictive class of content on that page. For example, if a Web page contains both Public and Confidential information, then you should follow the Confidential usage and access restrictions.
- ✓ By default, everyone with a valid NT user ID that can be authenticated on a master domain can access the Intranet. This includes all users with workstations running either Windows NT (desktop) or Windows 95 (laptop) and may include employees, agents, and authorized contractors. Any Intranet content not intended for everyone in this audience must be restricted in accordance with SFA security procedures.



<i>Exhibit 2 Sensitivity</i>		
<i>Classification</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Intranet Usage Restrictions</i>
<i>Public</i>	Information can be classified as Public only after it has been formally released for public distribution by an authorized SFA person or channel. Public information requires no protection against disclosure; it can be freely communicated with everyone.	None
<i>Internal</i>	Information must be classified as Internal if it does not clearly belong in any other classification (Public, Confidential, or Privileged). Most day-to-day information sources are for SFA's internal use only and should not be communicated outside SFA.	None
<i>Confidential</i>	Information must be classified as Confidential if it should not be disclosed to all employees; could damage SFA in some way if it were misinterpreted; or is considered private.	
<i>Privileged</i>	Information must be classified as Privileged if SFA legal department or counsel created or directed the creation of information under attorney-client privilege. This classification has special	Publishing Privileged information on the Intranet requires the written consent of the legal department. Web pages that send or receive Privileged



protections under law that other classifications do not.

information must be encrypted, the identity of the recipient confirmed by SFA Security Team, and an audit log maintained and archived for a period of no less than six months.

Must be clearly labeled with the "Privileged" image.

For detailed descriptions of these categories, contact the Webmaster (e-mail: [webmaster@ed.gov](mailto:webmaster@ed.gov))

## 11. Frames

- ⚠ You may choose whether or not to use frames in your Web site. If you choose to use frames, be aware of the following user interface hazards explained in Exhibit 3, Frame Hazards. Recommendations are listed in the right column.

Note: The WinVision Sreen Reader HTML Control Guidelines caution the use of frames for the vision impaired user since they are treated as separate windows. Where frames are incorporated, keep them to a minimum (no more than 2-3 ). Frames can be useful where it is important to kee commands, buttons or navigational elements available at all times on a lengthy page. (This prevents these design elements from being scrolled out of view.)



*Exhibit 3*

*Frame Hazards*

*Framing Wrong  
Content*

Make sure that the user automatically exits the <FRAMESET> when the context is no longer appropriate. In general, content outside the Web site should not be displayed within the <FRAMESET>. Also, make sure there are no links that allow recursive reentry of the <FRAMESET>.

*Content of Each  
Frame Should  
Make Sense By  
Itself*

Search engines may list the individual pages of a <FRAMESET> and consequently a user may see individual frame panes outside the context of the <FRAMESET> as a whole. If a page that is part of <FRAMESET> should not be displayed outside of the <FRAMESET>, then the appropriate <META> tag should be inserted into the page so that a search engine won't cue a user to display it.

*Don't Use on a  
Collection of Pages  
which Need to be  
Referred to  
Individually*

A specific page within a <FRAMESET> can not be added easily to a user's Favorites, by the user. Usually such a Favorite will return users to initial content of the <FRAMESET>, not necessarily the page they were on when they created the Favorite. Likewise, the URL displayed while browsing a <FRAMESET> generally doesn't change as users move from page to page. If all pages are accessible with one or at most two clicks from the initial page, then users will be able to find their way to the referenced page. However, Frames shouldn't be used for large collections of information requiring more than two clicks to reach any end point, e.g., manuals.



## 12. Web Page Templates

Web site templates are provided for you to use as a shell when you create your Web pages. There are several types of templates including Home Pages Specifications and the **Error! Reference source not found..**

A “Home page” is the top level of a Web site that acts as the entry point to the Web site. This page contains navigation to all areas of the site. This page is used once for each channel or shared service as the very top level of that channel's site.

“Table of Contents” pages refer to second tier Web pages that act as indexes to the main sections of content. For example, clicking the news button in the menu bar sends the user to a table of contents page indexing that site's news articles.

Note: Sometimes there will be the need for Table of Content or Menu Pages at the Third or even Fourth Tier.

“Contents Pages” are all the other pages in the Web site. For example, when creating a new news article, one would use the Content page template to present the news story. A reference link leading to that story would be added to the News table of contents page for that site. A shared navigation bar should be displayed to allow for lateral navigation across content pages within a group of pages.

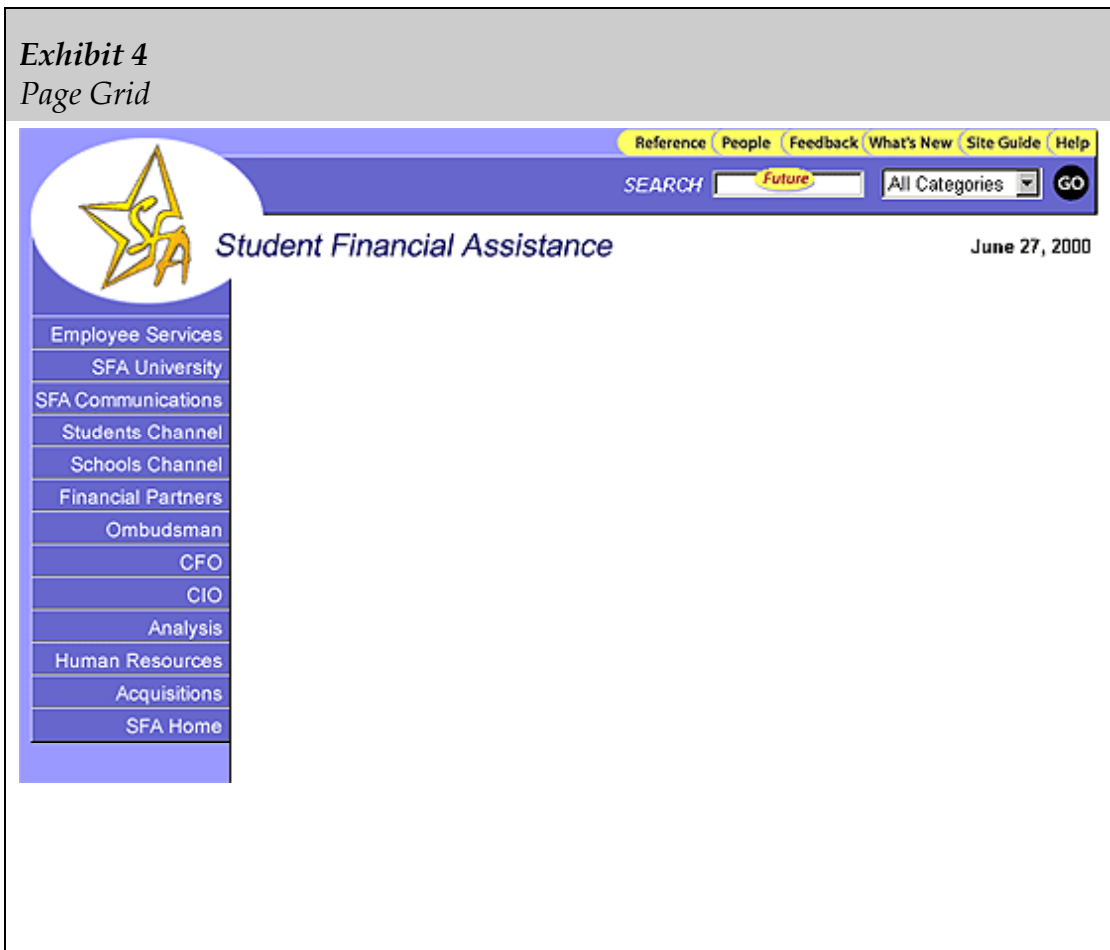
You may cut-and-paste into the existing inner and outer home page templates, which are found in /templates. You may also cut-and-paste into the Content Page Templates. The content page templates are "elastic," that is, they will stretch vertically to accommodate text of any length.

## 13. Layouts: The Page Grid, Top Menu Bar, and Left Navigation Bar

All SFA Web page templates are laid out in a grid. Using this basic grid ensures that consistency is maintained within the Intranet. The grid is measured in pixels, which is a length measurement that's commonly used with images and layouts. The total width of the grid is: 760 pixels. Elements of the templates, such as Headings and Story elements are explained using pixel measurement. Tables adjusted to this pixel width are included in the Web Page Templates. All SFA Web Page Templates at the Top and Tier levels contain a left navigation bar which allows for single click access across the SFA Intranet. Content level pages should display the left navigation bar.



*Exhibit 4*  
*Page Grid*



A standard Menu Bar must appear at the top of all pages, Home (Top Level), Table of Contents (Tier Two), and Content. The Menu Bar is generated by the SFA server as a "server side include." and is a component of all template pages.

## 14. Home Pages Specifications

A Home Page is the first page of a Web site that users see. The Home Page is often a launching pad for the other sections of the channel or project's Web site. If you're creating a Home Page, you must follow the Home Page template.

Each Channel and Shared Service has the option to target information to specific communities. They may send information to an Inner Audience, which consists of employees of that channel, and an Outer Audience, which consists of others outside the particular Channel or Shared Service. These Home Pages are almost identical in look and feel. In an effort to pre-sort



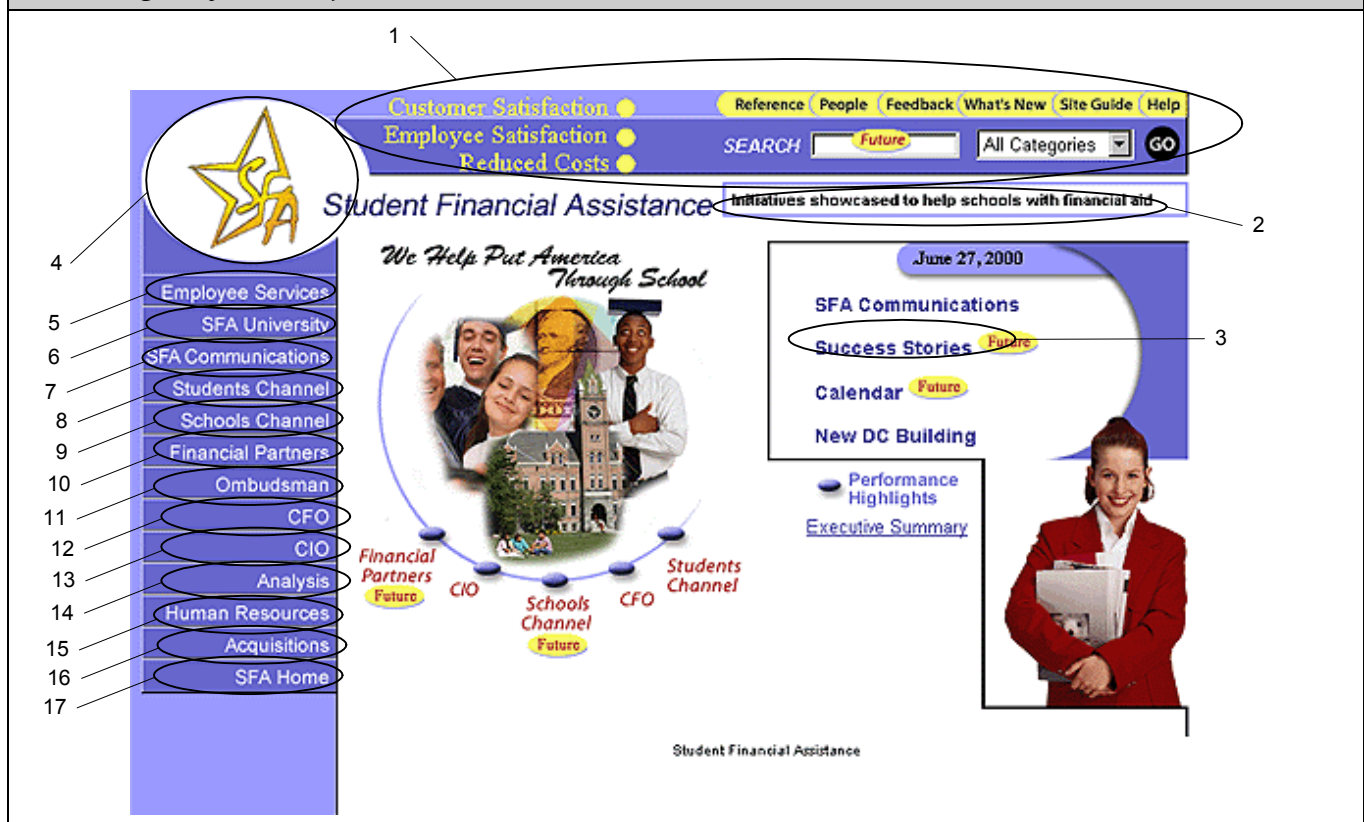
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and contextualize information for the viewers, the content of the pages changes to reflect the needs of the intended audience.

**Exhibit 5**

*Home Page Layout Template*



1. Menu Bar
2. Hot News
3. Success Stories  
Special news, such as employee recognition or channel rewards, are placed in this section.
4. Reserved for Logo  
Your logo should be located in a common images folder, either in “/images/” or a common area for your channel.
5. Reserved for Employee Services
6. Reserved for SFA University
7. Reserved for SFA Communications





8. Reserved for Schools Channel
9. Reserved for Students Channel
10. Reserved for Financial Partners
11. Reserved for Ombudsman
12. Reserved for CFO
13. Reserved for CIO
14. Reserved for Analysis
15. Reserved for Human Resources
16. Reserved for Contracts & Acquisitions
17. Reserved for SFA Home Page

### Footer

The footer is a set of information which should be placed at the base of every page using a server side include. The footer should contain:

- The name of the organization “Student Financial Assistance”

To apply all the attributes to this page using a cascading style sheet, include the following code within the <head></head> tags at the top of the HTML document:

```
<LINK REL=STYLESHEET HREF="/sfa.css" TYPE="text/css">
```

## 15. Palette, Fonts, and Images Templates

The SFA palette is a grouping of 216 colors that you should use to create your images. This palette is the common 216-color Web palette, which is referenced in many popular drawing and development programs. Using a common palette ensures that all images will appear in the browser as they were created. If you do not use this palette, your images may appear (dither) as a different color in the browser than what you intended, and it may look fuzzy and dotted.

Fonts used in the templates include: Arial and Helvetica. All body copy should be in Arial, and all headers should be in Arial.

Additionally, you may use an image template to help you create images that are consistent with the look of the SFA Intranet and sized properly for display.

## 16. Common Images

Any common images and their location on the intranet



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All top level images are in the common images folder of the root directory and the sub level images are in their respective images folder. Please refer to the SFA Directory Structure for more details.

If you would like to add images to these common directories, contact the Webmaster (e-mail: [webmaster@SFA.gov](mailto:webmaster@SFA.gov)).

### *Exhibit 11*

#### *Logos*

Use logos to identify major areas within the Intranet.

<i>Name</i>	<i>When to use</i>	<i>Location on the Intranet</i>
SFA Icon 	Include this icon on your page when the page content reflects issues that relate to the entire SFA organization	TBD



**Exhibit 12**  
**Site Guide**

You should use this enterprise-wide site guide for navigation.

**Reference** **People** **Feedback** **What's New** **Site Guide** **Help**

SEARCH  All Categories

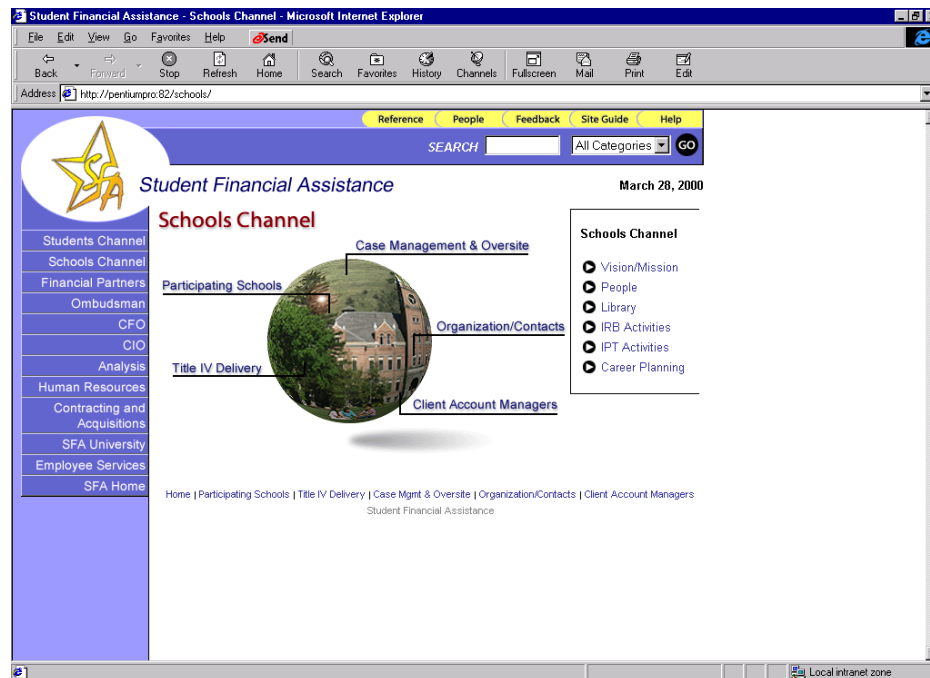
**Student Financial Assistance** June 27, 2000

**Site Guide**

<b>Employee Services</b>	<b>Employee Services</b>	<b>SFA University</b>
Life At Work		SFA University Training
News & Events		SFA Coach
Travel		SFA Employee Courses
Administration		News & Events
My Commute		FAQs
		Learning Coupon
<b>SFA Communications</b>	<b>SFA Communications</b>	<b>Students Channel</b>
Press Releases		About Us
Inside SFA		Reports
Transformation News		FAQs
Fact/Info Sheets		Publications Library
News Clips		News & Events
Style Guide		Working Together
Products & Services Calendar		Helps for SFA Parents
SFA Logos & Photos		Initiatives
New DC Building		
<b>Schools Channel</b>	<b>Schools Channel</b>	<b>Financial Partners</b>
About Us		About Us
News & Events		Financial Partners
Reports		Library
Library & Archives		FAQs
Processes		Initiatives
		News & Events
<b>Ombudsman</b>	<b>Ombudsman</b>	<b>CFO</b>
About Us		Administration
Policy		Purchasing
Reports		Financial Management
Forms & Letters		Career- Jobs & Training



**Exhibit 13**  
*Example of a Channel Home Page: School Channel*





## 17. Additional Resources

This guide reflects the experience of many developers as well as documented Intranet “best practices” at many companies. Developers who are interested in additional information about style and other user interface issues should refer to the Internet resources listed in Exhibit 15 below.

### ***Exhibit 15***

#### *Style and User Interface Resources on the Internet*

Apple Web Design Guide

(<http://applenet.apple.com/hi/web/web.html>)

Dave Siegel's Tips for Web Writers and Designers

(<http://www.dsiegel.com/tips/>)

Designing HTML Pages to Increase Accessibility to Users With Disabilities

(<http://www.trace.wisc.edu/HTMLgide/htmlgide.html>)

Gif89a

(<http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Techno/Gif89>)

Graphics Research Lab Notes on Writing for Interactive Media

(<http://www.electric-pages.com/notes/n1.htm>)

Matterform Media Qbullets

(<http://www.matterform.com/qbullets/index.html>)

National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) Review of Style Guides

(<http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/edu/trg/styleguide/index.html>)

Style Guide

(<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/users/gdr11/style-guide.html>)

Sun Guide to Web Style

(<http://www.sun.com/styleguide/>)

The Intranet Journal Design Tools

(<http://www.Intranetjournal.com/design.html>)



Usability Testing of WWW Designs

(<http://www.sun.com:80/sun-on-net/uideign/usabilitytest.html>)

Web Pages That Suck

(<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com>)

Webmaster Magazine Writing Style Resources

(<http://www.cio.com/WebMaster/style.html>)

What is Good Hypertext Writing

(<http://kbs.cs.tu-berlin.de/~jutta/ht/writing.html>)

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Style Guide for Online Hypertext

(<http://www.w3.org/pub/WWW/Provider/Style/Overview.html>)

Yale University School of Medicine Center for Advanced Instructional Media Style Manual

(First Edition:

[http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/StyleManual\\_Top.HTML](http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/StyleManual_Top.HTML)

(Second Edition (Requires JavaScript):

<http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/contents.html>)